

Sewickley Valley Historical Society *Signals*

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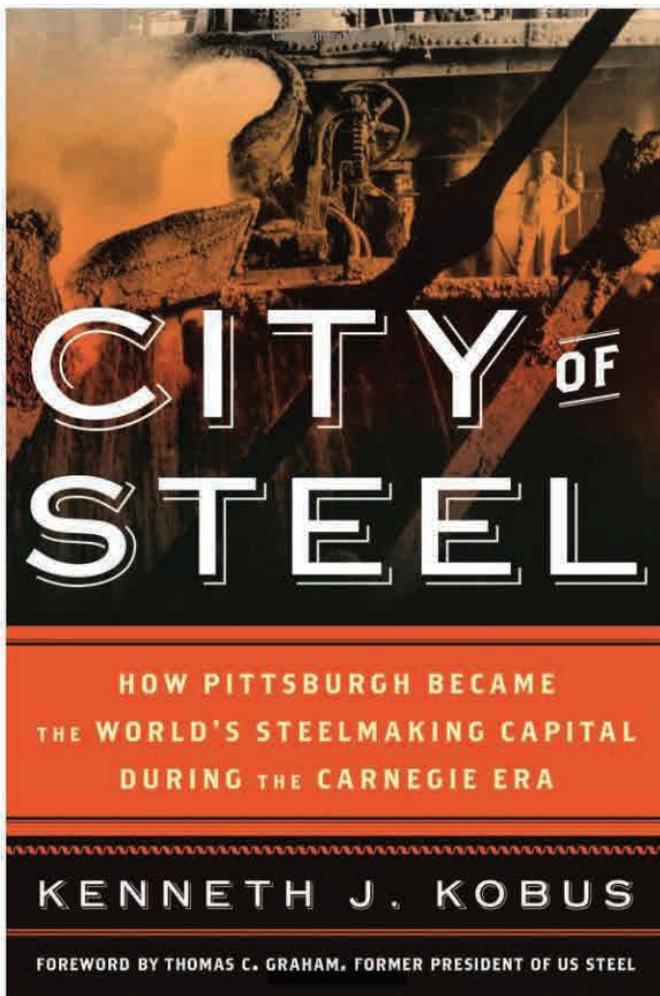
November 2016

Wednesday, November 9th, 2016 at 7:30 p.m.

Old Sewickley Post Office

*City of Steel: How Pittsburgh Became the World's
Steelmaking Capital During the Carnegie Era*

A Presentation by Ken Kobus, Author and Historian



Ken Kobus is a third generation steel worker, born in the Southside of Pittsburgh, growing up just 8 blocks from the Jones and Laughlin Steel Corporation Pittsburgh Works where both his father and grandfather worked. It was in this mill, during a visit with his father, when he saw his first open hearth furnace solidifying his interests and life to a future in the steel industry. Beginning as a laborer Ken worked his way through every aspect of the steel industry eventually putting himself through night school and obtaining a degree in engineering from the University of Pittsburgh. This allowed him to move into managerial positions before finally retiring as process safety manager for U.S. Steel - Mon Valley Works, Clairton Plant. Throughout his career he has amassed hundreds of photos and artifacts related to the Pittsburgh area's iron- and steelmaking history which he has donated to the University of Pittsburgh and the Rivers of Steel Heritage Museum in Homestead, Pa.

His new book *City of Steel* traces the evolution of the iron- and steelmaking industry following Andrew Carnegie and other magnates of the region whose forward thinking and engineering genius transformed Pittsburgh into the steel making capital of the world. Using the science behind steel making Ken discusses the technological advancements that fueled the industry's success while pointing out the human element of sacrifice and danger that steel workers faced on the job every day.

The mission of the Sewickley Valley Historical Society
is to promote interest in and to record, collect, preserve, and document the history of the Sewickley Valley.

White Violets, A Thread of Memories By Cornelia Wolfe Dickson

Reminiscences on the occasion of her 80th birthday by Cornelia Frances Wolfe Dickson [born 1896], one of seven children of Thomas Barnes Wolfe, designer of Calvary United Methodist Church, Allegheny, and Alice Evelyn Moore [married June 3, 1885]

Author Of The "Village of Sewickley" Reprinted from the Sewickley Herald, April 13, 1928

My father had bought a piece of un-cleared land on a hill up from the Ohio River [in Ben Avon], a piece 150 by 300 feet which ran at the rear down into a woods to a tiny brook, delight of childhood. We lived in a rented house on the road while he was clearing and building the new house, a white Colonial. I was born in this rented house, and we moved into the new one in the spring of 1898 when I was two.

All along the Ohio River, banked with hills, every mile or so a valley with a rocky creek breaks through: Bellevue, Avalon, Ben Avon, Emsworth, Glenfield, Sewickley. And the railroad to Chicago hugs the base of the hills, with a stop for each of the communities that grew up in the eighties and nineties along the railroad. And from my bedroom window I could see the line of hills across the river, those hills and Coraopolis, where the airport now swarms.

The land of our Grandmother Wolfe [Margaret Barnes Wolfe, Mrs. Henry Wolfe (1834-1908)] lay back of Sewickley [on Glen Mitchell Road, near the Snyder estate *Wilpen Hall*]: rolling fields, lovely trees, about two miles back from the river, long before it became the place of millionaire mansions and Sewickley Hunt Club. Grandfather [Henry Wolfe, died 1892] had bought the land in Sewickley Heights, thirty-two acres, in 1863 and took his wife and family there, to live the life of a landed gentleman.

It had all begun to dwindle and crumble by my time, but it was the most utterly charming dwelling, and the remnants remained. There were always fine horses, hired men to farm, an apple orchard, and a cherry orchard. I used to sit in the big old carriage barn where there were relics of the surrey with its fringed top, of the barouche which had been like the Queen's coach, and a third something-or-other like a Central Park carriage. It was pretty dark in that barn, and hot, and the sun streaked through in stripes, chickens walked at will and scolded at me. Sometimes I found an odd egg. But I could dream my dreams of life there.

The Farm was a lovely place to be. The land lay on rolling acres, not a flat field there. It was six or seven miles from our Ben Avon suburb, and one or another of us was often there. The house sat far back from the road, maybe 200 feet, the drive lined with tall, blackish-green pines, which also clustered on the north side of the house. In my day they were old and crumbling but still strewing their lovely cones. The house, with center hall and stairway, was not large but with the great charm of being a natural split-level. When one passed through the front door into a hall with stairs and rooms to either side, there was a forever sweet fragrance of rose petals- the scent of things loved and cared for. The dining room chairs were oak Captain's chairs. There was always a linen cloth on the table; there was no informality in meals here; and there were chests and cupboards. Best of all was the eastern sun in the morning! Back of the dining room and two steps up were the storage cellars. Apples in barrels, potatoes in bags, shelves and shelves

of apple butter, jams, jellies, canned fruits, pickles and relishes, something made of watermelon rind, delectable, both sweet and spicy. The odors of this storage room hung pleasantly in this room, usually outdone by the baking and cooking smells from the kitchen. It had a sink with a cold-water pump in one corner, the enormous range, and always bread, or pies, or butter churning, or canning going on in endless procession. On one side of the house was a porch covered with grapevines of the little red Catawba grapes. On the other side was a terrace paved with flagstones where in our childhood there was a hammock. This was our resting place. From here one could see beyond the slightly sloping fields stretching up to the great maple tree, which was our picnic place. To the west the road and fields, and to the east land sloping down to the Glenfield Road, a narrow tree-lined valley and a farm with a vicious barking dog. The driveway had some old gravel and pebbles worked into it and the farmyard was square. If it had been of stone or brick, it would have been like the little manor farms abroad. The rear of the carriage barn, the hay barn, the blacksmith shop, the corn crib, and the horse and cow barns all opened to this square.

Now, if anyone should mention white violets, my mind and memory spring to the surely most enchanting thing on this farm: the Springhouse. Down from the back terrace, perhaps a fifty-five foot drop sloping from the drive, under a cluster of pines, stood a little grey-shingled gabled building. The floors were flags, and a natural spring had been piped around two little rooms in a little moat about eighteen inches wide and ten inches deep- icy clear and cold and always flowing in and out. Great crocks of new milk were set down in the moat to cool, to be skimmed into thick wrinkly cream for the table or churned and made into pats of butter, oval, about a pound each, and stamped with a clover leaf. All around the springhouse was a carpet in the springtime- a carpet of white violets. And all along that path leading down were berries- gooseberries, raspberries and currants- jewels of red, the dark ones heavily too sweet. And who today has seen the pale green translucence of the gooseberry, its sharp black stem and fruit the size of our largest blueberries, sharp and pungent to taste? And the pies were tartly sweet, like those of young green apples, delicious to recall.

Beginning in the seventies came the burgeoning time of natural gas, and three small gas wells chomped away on the farm. For this they got permanent free gas rights, so that even in my day there were gas lights and stoves and fireplace burners. Considering the work connected with wood and coal this was a lift from a terrible burden. Going to Grandmother Wolfe's was our delight. We respected all her traditions of good behavior and her interest in us as people. And we adored Uncle Charles, the son who stayed home and farmed. He was fond of children and met us

on a happy level. We followed him, riding a hayload, feeding or harnessing horses, helped put the grain or corn in the mangers. We were fascinated by the blacksmith shop. They shod their own horses, and Uncle Charlie was still doing this when I was ten or twelve. I spent many happy hours there watching the sparks, the shaping of the shoes, keeping well back, for the horses of that day, Tom and Don, were powerful chestnut stallions, who it seemed to me had very long and agile legs. I had learned to ride and to drive the red pony trap he got for us, with the stubbornest little Shetland pony, Ivy, that could have ever been foaled. But even with a western saddle, I could not stay on Don or Tom. They did not want me up there, and they always won, usually in a grassy bank by the catalpa trees. I was just dislodged but never hurt. And I still love horses.

It seems to me incredible how well they sustained the ways of the country gentry. After the little Blackburn Church near the school, they joined the Sewickley Methodist Church. Uncle Charles in fine clothing and starched shirt and collar and gloves would drive two fine horses and a low "trap" to the door. My Grandmother in her bonnet, lace at the neck of her dress, and in her fine black cloak and white gloves, would be ready, and also any little girl, well brushed, inspected, provided with a hand-hemmed linen handkerchief, a good coat and a beaver hat with a ribbon down its back. The horses would nip on down the gradual valley to Sewickley, past a chain of small reservoirs like ponds in a park [the Water Works]. And during the sermon, from my grandmother's reticule, several peppermints would be furtively put in my hand, to carry me through the preaching. Even then I loved the singing and knew most of the words to the hymns by heart.

Night would come, and in a small bed in the ell of the bedroom, one or two small girls (for Uncle Madison's Eleanor was often there) would go through a nightly ritual. Undress, fold your clothing neatly, put your socks or stockings over your shoes. Then you were washed at the washstand, put modestly into your high-necked, long-sleeved little nightgown, hair was thoroughly brushed, and a little embroidered white linen bonnet was tied over your hair, a bow under the chin. The pillow sham was removed, and then into the small bed, followed by a Now I Lay Me Down, and God Bless, and a reminder that there was a covered chamber pot under the bed.

Pittsburgh and Allegheny, not yet united (that would happen in 1907), were bursting at their borders, and the great unbroken spreading to the suburbs was on. Out of the North Side, above the railroad and above the river, there ran the Beaver Road. This was old, and along it stood the large Victorian mansions and many-roomed monstrosities, and these were carriage-trade merchants and bankers, not wealth. They had servants, mostly Irish girls, and horses, and a carriage house where the gardener and horse-carer lived above. The grounds were usually long, deep yards with a garden. But by 1900 it had begun to open up and change. Streets were cut, middle class houses went up along the new streets, sidewalks were laid, and sewers, and presently the gas-lighter man was lost to us at evening, and electricity came in, and a town council. Streets were planted with young trees—which now fill this sloping hillside of homes with deep green shade all summer long. Street cars were put through, open cars in summer, and they cost a nickel. There were three available churches [in Ben Avon], Presbyterian (the largest), Methodist

Episcopal and later the United Presbyterian. We had a yellow brick four-room school, and you learned your three R's, or else.

The steel mills lighted the skies red at night; the soot was so heavy that your constant trouble to stay clean demanded time and care. My mother had two sets of curtains for each window, for they were soiled in two or three weeks. My father would often change his clean-that-morning shirt if he had a meeting. The few negro families who lived in the valleys either took in washing or came to you. We had a Mrs. Gaither who came three weekdays just to wash and iron. We had fresh dresses often twice a day, and endless lines of white panties and petticoats hung in the sun. The clothes were washed in standing tubs, on a washboard, and boiled in a big copper boiler in the cellar laundry, and ironing went on and on and on.

Cars were still rather talked of than seen. A Stanley Steamer tried our hilly road once and didn't make it. You either walked, or had horses, or went downhill to the trains. Once our father's firm was building a great stone mansion in Sewickley Heights. Those acres—a stone's throw from Grandmother's land—became a dwelling place of millionaires. However, H. J. Heinz (1844-1919) himself was a simple, plain, small man with white hair and whiskers, and a very religious man. It had been arranged that he would speak to the men of our little church, and so, one wet spring evening, the great limousine came up to our house. He had with him his son Clifford, about seventeen, very shy and ill at ease, but H. J. sat down comfortably in a big mahogany chair while my father got his coat, and asked to see the children. My mother had us ready, and my sister and I, perhaps five and seven, came in. He reached out with both hands, drew us to him, put an arm around each of us with great affection and asked our names. And then he said, "Have you been in an automobile?" No, we hadn't even dreamed of such a thing. He said, "Get your coats and come along." The chauffeur, in cap and uniform, dropped Mr. Heinz, Clifford and our father at the church door in Emsworth, and he said to the chauffeur, "Take them for a drive, take them home, and be back here by nine." We were speechless in our miracle. The car took us down the Beaver Road, and we stood in the back, one at each side. I could just see over the window ledge. The Beaver was roughly paved, but when the car turned up the narrow steep valley at Glenfield, which led to the back of Grandmother's, the road was a river of mud, and he found a place to turn and take us home again. I remember the deep spring dark, the rain, the excitement of this moving and luxurious little room; I am sure the chauffeur remembered the Glenfield mud. It was years, of course, before the car became what it is: covers the world with concrete, kills a lot of us, makes free love available to the young, but remains man's deep delight, warmed or chilled, free, free to step into his privacy and power at his own door, and go where he will, or turn around and come home again.

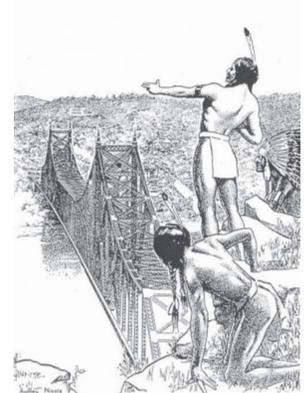
Here in this little farmland our grandmother- and she was a Great lady- carried on until she died in the spring of 1908, never relaxing her graciousness, her manners, her duty to the church and to the neighbors.

On my last trip to the farm, Uncle Charles got out the old sleigh, polished it up, hung the bells, put in the shafts his sorrel blue-ribbon pacer mare and drove me over the packed snows of Sewickley. The farm was sold that year.

Sewickley Valley Historical Society
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